THE Leshan Giant Buddha in Sichuan province greets international visitors with improved services.—Courtesy China Daily

Leshan Giant Buddha draws surge of overseas visitors

By Xu Lin

OVERSEAS visitors marvel at the grandeur of the Leshan Giant Buddha — the largest cliff-carved statue in China — and take photos with the iconic figure from a multitude of angles.

Carved into a hillside over 1,300 years ago, the 71-metre-tall seated statue of Maitreya Buddha is a must-visit attraction in Leshan city, Southwest China's Sichuan province.

Boosted by visa facilitation policies, rich cultural and tourism activities, and improved services, "China Travel" continues to gain momentum among international tourists. In response, tourist attractions across the country, including the Leshan Giant Buddha, are ramping up their promotional efforts to attract overseas visitors.

The Leshan Giant Buddha, along with Mount Emei, was inscribed as a Unesco World Heritage site in 1996 for its cultural significance.

The statue's appeal is reflected in the numbers. According to official data, by Nov 11, the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area had received 300,898 international tourists — a 44.74 percent year-on-year increase. The top five countries from which visitors come are Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Vietnam.

Zhu Lili, deputy director of the management committee of the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, attributes this success to the incentives they offer travel agencies, such as group tour discounts, and high-quality services that ensure a good travel experience.

In the ticket hall, overseas tourists can communicate with staff members in their own language using an artificial intelligence translation screen, whether to purchase tickets or inquire about travel routes.

In addition, overseas tourists can log in to a multilingual online platform to purchase tickets, seek assistance at two service stations specifically for them, and make payments smoothly using credit cards, cash or Chinese e-payment systems.

The scenic area has deployed 100 multilingual portable AI translation devices to its on-site employees. This initiative aims to facilitate in-depth communication with tourists and conduct surveys to gather first-hand data on the motives for their visit, their experiences, and any suggestions they may have for improvement.

At the end of September, a group of international influencers were invited to explore the Leshan Giant Buddha and share their travel experiences online. Zhu believes it can strengthen the city's reputation as a welcoming destination for overseas tourists.

"It's important to understand the preferences and consumption habits of inbound visitors to provide convenient and comfortable services upon their arrival," she says.

"We also need to showcase the Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist elements of the Leshan Giant Buddha more engagingly, letting overseas visitors gain a deeper understanding of China's traditional culture through a fresh, immersive experience."

Currently, the Leshan representatives are also negotiating with the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt and will establish partnerships with the management committees of the Pyramids of Giza and Luxor Temple.—China Daily / ANN

The jolt that lays bare Dhaka's fragility

Most of the buildings, identified by the civic agency as requiring retrofitting, are government-owned

By Helemul Alam, Dipan Nandy and Ahmed Deepto

BUILDING owners often chase short-term gains during construction, flouting rules as the civic agency looks the other way.

Every time a disaster strikes, experts raise alarms and the agency vows action. Then some more days go, the dust settles, and everything returns to the old, perilous rhythm.

After last Friday's 5.7-magnitude earthquake, which caused at least four deaths in Dhaka, experts warned that far greater losses await if the authorities fail to act now.

According to the Dhaka district administration, at least 14 buildings in the capital sustained damage from the quake, while the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) put the number at over 50.

"We are still working. Many more buildings will be identified," Rajuk Chairman Md Riazul Islam told *The Daily Star* over the weekend.

He said the next step was an immediate assessment of all buildings in Dhaka, at least those under the Detailed Area Plan (DAP), to determine which structures cannot withstand even minor shocks.

Rajuk is, by mandate, responsible for monitoring buildings from planning through construction and ensuring that rules are followed thereafter.

Criticising the agency for chronic failures, Professor Munaz Ahmed Noor, vice president of the Bangladesh Earthquake Society, said Rajuk "always wakes up after a major incident", largely because it lacks the manpower for sustained oversight.

Prof Munaz said everyone should follow the building code very strictly when constructing any structure.

In the past, the National Building Code was neither properly regulated nor enforced, which led many buildings to be identified as vulnerable in the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Survey, he said.

"The loads used in design must be applied correctly, and after the design is completed, the detailing must also be done properly. This is often where major negligence occurs. Sometimes the design is done correctly, but the reinforcement is not placed as detailed in the drawings," he added.

Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of BUET's civil engineering department stressed that damaged buildings must be examined immediately and prioritised based on risk.

"Some buildings have column damage, others none. We need clear segmentation to decide what must be done first," he said.

He warned that a stronger earthquake could cause far more devastating collapses. "If we act now, we can prevent greater losses."

He suggested Rajuk issue notices or newspaper advertisements instructing homeowners to assess their buildings and submit reports. Experts could then guide the next steps.

Although the number of visibly damaged structures remains limited, he said many across Dhaka likely suffered some degree of structural impact.

No action on risky buildings

In 2022, the Rajuk identified 42 buildings in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj as being at immediate risk and ordered them vacated and demolished within three months. It also listed 187 structures requiring retrofitting. Most have seen no progress.

The high-risk buildings belong to several government and autonomous bodies, including the Education Engineering Department, Department of Health Education, LGED, Jagannath University, Dhaka University, Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board, the Institute of Leather Technology, and the Bangladesh Medical University hospital. They were flagged during a survey of 3,252 structures under the Urban Resilience Project.

Asked about these buildings, the Rajuk chairman said most were government-owned, and that a citywide reassessment was essential.

He said risky buildings were now being listed, sealed, or cleared as needed.

"This earthquake is a major warning. Science suggests a bigger shock may be ahead," he said.

He added that the work must be collaborative, involving Rajuk, city corporations, disaster management authorities, the army, and the fire service.

"We are disconnecting the utility meters of those constructing illegally. Some keep constructing using stolen meters or generators," Riazul said.

He urged owners to consider demolishing unsafe or ageing structures on small plots and then rebuilding jointly. "Combining plots may mean short-term losses, but it brings long-term benefits."—The Daily Star (Bangladesh) / ANN

REPORTERS and police personnel stand around rubble that fell from a damaged building following an earthquake in Old Dhaka.—AFP / file

South Korea to host G20 in 2028

By Son Ji-hyoung

SOUTH Korea will host the 2028 Group of 20 (G20) Summit, as its leaders' declaration adopted on Saturday confirmed the country would assume the rotating presidency of the annual multilateral summit.

"We commit to working together under the United States' Presidency in 2026 and meeting again in the United Kingdom in 2027 and in the Republic of Korea in 2028," read the declaration. The Republic of Korea is South Korea's official name.

President Lee Jae Myung will chair the international summit, which falls within his single five-year term ending in June 2030. The announcement comes less than a month after Lee presided over the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings in Gyeongju, North Gyeongsang Province.

Lee said during Sunday's session that he would "ensure that the G20 further consolidates its role as the premier forum for international economic cooperation."

Hosting the G20 on the 20th anniversary of its launch "raises expectations that South Korea could play a leading role in fostering stronger cooperation of the G20 members to unravel complexities in international affairs," Oh Hyun-joo, third deputy director of the presidential National Security Office, told reporters in a briefing in Johannesburg on Sunday.

The 2028 summit will mark South Korea's second time leading a G20 gathering, following hosting the fifth summit in November 2010. The G20 held its inaugural meeting in Washington in 2008 and convened twice a year in 2009 and 2010 before shifting to an annual format starting in 2011.

When G20 leaders last gathered in Korea in 2010, they outlined a broad agenda for global policy coordination, including achieving fiscal sustainability, curbing excessive exchange-rate volatility and creating jobs through structural reforms.

Leaders also pledged to support global rebalancing by helping low-income countries build the capacity to address their own development challenges. These commitments were reflected in the Seoul Action Plan and the Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth.—The Korea Herald / ANN

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A LEADING REGIONAL ALLIANCE OF 20 NEWS TITLES BASED IN MAJOR CAPITALS OF SOUTH, EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Asian stories are taking centre stage

The whole slate from Disney+, one of the biggest studios in the global streaming market, tells us of a seismic shift in the world of storytelling

By Wanggo Gallaga

LAST week, at Hong Kong Disneyland, Disney+ held a preview event for media, influencers, and content creators to share with the Asia Pacific region the brand new line-up of shows for 2026. It was an impressive all-day event with an incredible array of Japanese, Korean, and global series (I refuse to call them content) that is set to be released throughout next year.

The Disney+ 2026 Preview launch brought out big-named Korean celebrities such as Lee Dong Wook for the second season of *A Shop for Killers*; Ji Chan Wook and Doh Kyungsoo for the current series *The Manipulated*; Park Bo Young and Kim Sungcheol for *Gold Land*; and Hyun Bin, Jung Woosung, and Woo Do Hwan for *Made in Korea*, which is debuting on Dec 24. The first episode of which is an explosive, smart thriller set in the tumultuous, politically-charged era of 1970s Korea.

Meanwhile, Japan has also been marked as a centre for great storytelling, with Luke Kang, President of the Walt Disney Company Asia Pacific, sharing that anime titles have seen a 60 per cent growth in countries outside of the Asia Pacific Region, with Brazil, France, and Mexico being singled out amongst the many.

Disney+'s latest original anime production, *Twisted Wonderland*, which originally started out as a video game, has become the #1 most-viewed Japanese original anime globally. Its success has ensured a season two and three, which are already in production. Their partnership with anime studio Kodansha continues with new seasons of hit shows like *Wan Dance*, *The Medalist* season two, and *Tokyo Revengers: War of the Three Titans Arc* (season 3).

In fact, it will also be collaborating with legendary Japanese game designer Hideo Kojima and director Takayuki Sano for *Death Stranding*, the anime series. It is a standalone series set in the world of the video game.

"I wanted to share that world with people who don't play video games, and I asked Sano to use the anime platform with what it does best," Kojima says.

Of the global shows, while new seasons of *The Bear* and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* were previewed, the biggest stage was left for the highly acclaimed hit show of last year: *Shogun*.

A whole panel was set up for showrunners Justin Marks and Rachel Kondo and lead star and producer Hiroyuki Sanada, so they can talk about the new season and field questions from the media guests.

This whole slate from one of the biggest studios in the world streaming market tells us of a seismic shift in the world of storytelling. The growth in interest in Korean and Japanese stories and storytelling structures like anime and K-dramas from outside of Asia is telling us that the global demand for narratives is de-centring from the Western mold.

It's what Kang talks about — how Disney+ was looking specifically for local stories in Korea and Japan that are authentic to those cultures, and leveraging the Disney brand to make these stories globally popular and successful.

Around the world, we are all looking for new kinds of stories and a different way of seeing the world. Culture will be reframed by the media that we consume. —The Inquirer (Philippines) / ANN

NEWSMAKERS

TEHRAN: Drummers play to mark the death anniversary of Hazrat Fatima, the daughter of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), in Imam Hussain Square.—AFP

FUKUOKA PREFECTURE (Japan): Ukrainian sumo wrestler Danylo Yavhusishyn (centre), poses with his cup after winning the Grand Sumo Tournament.—AFP

KOLKATA: Nuns and devotees take part in a religious procession to mark Corpus Christi.—AFP

Humanoid robot sets Guinness record with 106km walk

SHANGHAI: A Chinese-made humanoid robot has set a new Guinness World Record by walking 106km between the country's eastern cities without shutting down.

Developed by Shanghai-based Agibot, the android A2 set off from Suzhou on the night of Nov 10 and reached the Bund of Shanghai in the early hours of Nov 13.

Powered by Agibot's rapid hot-swap battery system, the robot remained active for the entire journey, officially covering 106.3 kilometers as certified on Thursday.

"Walking from Suzhou to Shanghai is a tough task even for many humans, but the robot achieved it," said Wang Chuang, senior vice-president of Agibot.

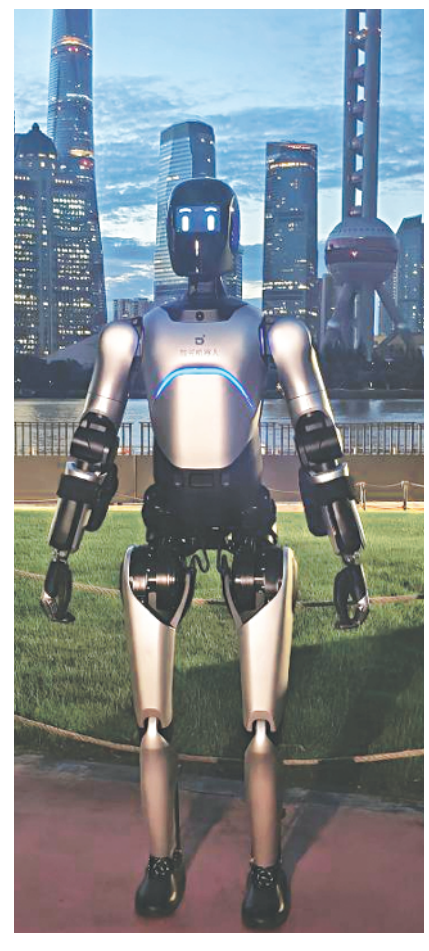
"It proves the maturity of the robot's hardware, cerebellar balance algorithms and endurance, laying a solid foundation for large-scale commercial deployment," Wang added.

Equipped with dual GPS modules, LiDAR and infrared depth sensors, the A2 navigated complex scenarios such as traffic lights, narrow passages and crowded sidewalks, maintaining stable perception during day and night.

The robot navigated asphalt roads, tiled walkways, bridges, tactile paving and ramps, all while following traffic rules.

In an exchange with *Xinhua* reporters upon arrival, the robot described the journey as an "unforgettable experience in its machine life", humorously suggesting it "might need new shoes".

In April, the Tien Kung Ultra, built by the Beijing Humanoid Robot Innovation Centre, completed a 21km half-marathon in 2 hours 40 minutes.—China Daily / ANN



THE robot navigated asphalt roads, tiled walkways, bridges, tactile paving and ramps, all while following traffic rules. —Courtesy Xinhua/China Daily

SONGKHLA (Thailand): People wade through a flooded area in the Hat Yai district following heavy rainfall.—Reuters

NAJAF (Iraq): A man shovels salt from Lake Najaf, which experts estimate has lost more than 10,000 acres of its surface water.—AFP